



Case Study 23

Zoning to Conserve Greenspace in Davidson, North Carolina

Smart Growth is an increasingly popular approach for responding to a range of community problems such as urban sprawl, traffic congestion, and loss of greenspace. A Smart Growth America poll conducted in September 2000 revealed that 78 percent of Americans favor both the concept of Smart Growth and the strategies necessary to implement it. The poll explained that “the term Smart Growth refers to giving priority to improving services, such as schools, roads, affordable housing, and public transportation in existing communities rather than encouraging new housing and commercial development and new highways in the countryside (Smart Growth America 2005).” In the 2000 elections, 83 percent of the 209 ballot initiatives nationwide to protect greenspace, control development, and otherwise implement Smart Growth policies were approved. Real estate trends also reveal a preference for Smart Growth. According to leading real estate analysts, home buyers increasingly favor living in neighborhoods that are convenient and have a strong sense of community.

Smart Growth is a powerful tool for conserving natural resources, improving quality of life, and creating affordable housing. Davidson, North Carolina, is just one community in the South where Smart Growth is taking off. Davidson was the 2004 winner of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Overall Excellence in Smart Growth Award. Just north of metropolitan Charlotte, Davidson and neighboring communities are under significant development pressures. While many of these communities advocate Smart Growth principles, local zoning ordinances often fail to protect significant open space. Even with well-funded land acquisition

programs, contiguous tracts of greenspace are becoming scarcer. The people of Davidson decided that protecting greenspace was important to maintain the town’s sense of place and the rural character of the countryside. In 1999 the town put a moratorium on growth and increased the zoning requirement for open space from 10 percent to 50 percent. Initially the ordinance upset developers, but some are realizing the benefits of including large greenspace in their designs. Developer Frank Jacobus had a 50-acre site under contract when the ordinance was passed. “I was disappointed and concerned because we had a lot at stake financially. But I’m very excited about the project. It is a beautiful project, a great design. People will enjoy living there,” Jacobus said.

Many new developments in Davidson promote open space as their prime amenity, which illustrates how important home buyers consider it. New neighborhoods are made up a variety of lot sizes and are required to include 12.5 percent affordable housing (new homes start at \$100,000). Many new subdivisions in the area have a neighborhood park within a five-minute walk and all new developments are required to include plans for pedestrian, bicycle, and street circulation.

Tree-lined streets, sidewalks on both sides of the street, narrow travel lanes, and on-street parking are also required to encourage walking and biking. The following advertisement for the Bradford neighborhood, one of Davidson’s Smart Growth subdivisions, illustrates how important these amenities are to builders, real estate professionals, and prospective buyers.

Parks and Trails Weave into Davidson's Open Space.

Step out your door and find fresh air, trees, and room to roam. Almost half of the Bradford neighborhood is set aside as open space—one of the themes in the Davidson, NC Town Vision Plan. Follow the path of serene stream through a four-acre park that has been described as a “cathedral of trees”—with sycamores, poplars, huge oaks, per-simmons, and other native species... Stroll or pedal on Bradford's winding sidewalks and bike trails, then continue downtown or to school on Davidson's pedestrian-friendly walks and trails... If you could choose your dream home and place it in the ideal town, Bradford is that place.

Sources

Cedarcroft Homes, Davidson NC, website, <http://www.cedarcrofthomes.com> (accessed August 10, 2005).

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Smart Growth America. 2005. Online brochure, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/SGBOOK.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2005).

Town of Davidson website. Planning Announcements, <http://www.ci.davidson.nc.us/eventdetail.asp?scheduleitemid=851> (accessed August 18, 2005).